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Organizational session for 1994

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 25 January 1994, at 3 p.m.

Temporary President: Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile)

President: Mr. BUTLER (Australia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT declared open the organizational session of the Economic and Social Council for 1994.

In establishing the Council as one of the principal organs of the Organization, the authors of the Charter had sought to confirm the importance of economic and social questions in international relations. The Council's wide-ranging functions and powers (analysis, but also action and coordination) made it the appropriate body to deal effectively with economic and social questions, which were becoming increasingly interdependent in the post-cold war period.

Over the years, a number of attempts had been made to strengthen the effectiveness of the Council which, since its establishment, had had to compete with other international bodies such as the Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Experience had shown, however, that if reforms were to be successful and the Organization was to achieve its socio-economic goals, States must demonstrate the necessary political will.

For the past three years, following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 45/264, the Council had been organizing its work in several segments, among which the high-level segment, the coordination segment and the operational activities segment were of particular interest. In that respect, the summary prepared by the President at the end of the high-level segment could be a useful basis for the decisions taken by the Council at its plenary session. The high-level segment would therefore gain a capacity for action which would supplement its deliberative function.

After reviewing the results achieved by the Council over the past three years in its various areas of competence (social development, drug abuse control and drug trafficking, status of women, criminal justice, economic development, population, human rights and humanitarian affairs), he referred, in particular, to the World Summit for Social Development, which was an eloquent example of the results which the Council was capable of achieving when it coordinated the functions entrusted to it under the Charter with the needs of the international community as articulated by the States of which it was composed.

(The Temporary President)

The success of the restructuring of the Organization in the economic, social and related fields launched by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/162 would depend on the way in which the reforms were implemented. The restructuring process aimed, in particular, to give the Council a more active role in evaluating the work carried out by the specialized agencies, by providing general guidance which would enable them to perform their tasks in a more effective and coordinated manner.

During his term of office, he had undertaken a number of initiatives designed to improve the functioning of the Council. He had considered it appropriate to enter into consultations with each of the regional groups and to encourage the participation of ministers in the high-level segment. Believing that the Council's relations with its subsidiary bodies should be strengthened, he had suggested that meetings should be held between the chairmen of the subsidiary bodies and the bureau of the Council. He had also drawn the attention of Member States to the contrast between the spectacular increase in expenditure on peace-keeping operations and the simultaneous decline in resources devoted to the various development programmes. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, he had proposed that the Council should establish a mechanism for intergovernmental consultations, which would involve representatives of universities, enterprises, trade unions, political movements and non-governmental organizations. The meetings organized in that context would be devoted to priority subjects in the economic and social fields.

Expressing appreciation to the members of the Council and to all those who had assisted him in fulfilling his mandate, he said that the Council's main task now was to perform effectively its role as principal organ of the Organization. To that end, it had to operate with greater flexibility and speed, and make a collective effort to find solutions to the problems facing the international community in the economic and social field.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT informed the members of the Council that the Group of Western European and Other States had endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Butler (Australia) for the office of President of the Council for 1994.

Mr. Butler (Australia) was elected President by acclamation.

Mr. Butler (Australia) took the Chair.

The PRESIDENT said that the current situation was not unlike the situation at the end of the Second World War: already at that time, it had been recognized that economic and social problems lay at the heart of major international disputes, and that the achievement of international security and peace would depend on the Council's ability to solve those problems. Under the Charter, the Security Council was responsible for ensuring the protection of States, but the Council was entrusted with the creation of conditions of stability and well-being necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations, in cooperation with Member States. Although, over the past 48 years, the Council had not been as deeply affected by the cold war as the Security Council and had been able to make significant progress in many areas, it had reached a stage where reforms were necessary. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly had adopted decisions which must now be implemented by members of the Council. To that end, the Council must develop effective working methods so as to provide coordination and guidance for the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation, within the framework of the operational activities segment, carry out its supervisory role with maximum efficiency, within the framework of the general segment, and further improve the coordination segment. If it wished to succeed in its task of system-wide coordination and integration of policies and activities, the Council must carry out concrete action beyond the confines of the Organization. In particular, as requested by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session, the Council, at its substantive session in 1994, must consider "An agenda for development" which should be, for economic and social questions, what "An agenda for peace" had been for peace keeping operations: those operations had undergone unprecedented development over the past three years. In that respect, he proposed to make contact with the President of the General Assembly who, in resolution 48/166, had been invited to promote broad-based discussions and an exchange of views in the hope that a positive interrelationship would be established between the General Assembly and the Council; Article 65 of the Charter provided for cooperation and exchanges of information between the Council and the Security Council. Lastly, in order to fulfil its new role, the Council must remember that the United Nations was designed to be a centre for

(The President)

harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of common ends; the Council must therefore strive to respond to the legitimate expectation of each human being who aspired to a decent standard of living in a framework of peace.

Under rule 18 of its rules of procedure, the Council was required to elect four Vice-Presidents. He had been informed that, as a result of informal consultations among the regional groups, the following candidates had been nominated: Mr. Dangue Rewaka (Gabon) for the Group of African States and Mr. Bohez (Romania) for the Group of Eastern European States. The names of the candidates from the Group of Asian States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States would be communicated at a later stage.

Mr. Dangue Rewaka (Gabon) and Mr. Bohez (Romania) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Council for 1994 by acclamation.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The PRESIDENT said that, on the basis of Council resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114 and General Assembly resolutions 45/264 and 48/162 on the restructuring and revitalization of the Economic and Social Council, the Council, at its current session, would have before it the provisional agenda for that session (E/1994/2 and Add.1) and a note from the Secretary-General concerning the Council's proposed basic programme of work (E/1994/1). He also drew the Council's attention to the matters requiring action at the current session listed under item 2 of the provisional agenda.

In conformity with the provisions of paragraph 2 (1) of Council resolution 1988/77, he intended to hold consultations on the proposed basic programme of work and other organizational matters, which should make it possible to shorten the organizational session.

In accordance with long-established practice and in consultation with members of the Bureau and of the Council, he proposed to appoint a coordinator for the meeting to be held on 27 and 28 January 1994 by the open-ended working group established under resolution 1993/80 to examine ways and means of improving practical arrangements for the work of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.

Mr. FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) said that, according to established practice, the Committee itself, as a subsidiary body of the Council, should appoint the chairman either from the members of its bureau or from its 21 members, of which Cuba was one.

The PRESIDENT explained that he intended to undertake consultations immediately to appoint, not a chairman, but a coordinator, possibly from among the members of the bureau or of the Council itself, on the basis of established practice, so as to open - and not preside over - the meeting of the open-ended working group, which was a separate body from the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. He would take into account the concerns of the representative of Cuba and inform him of the outcome of his consultations.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.